

# *Abhiññā Sutta*

(*Aṅguttara Nikāya, 4 Nipāta*)

## The Discourse of Supernormal (direct) Knowledges

Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of wisdom. Wisdom is the gem of men (පැකැස්ස නරානං රතනං). Wisdom purifies one's mind (පැකැස්සය පරිසුළුකරයි). There is no light like wisdom (නන්වී පැකැස්ස සමා ආභා). That is why Buddhism encourages us to improve our wisdom to the maximum. The more someone gained wisdom, the more he or she realized suffering and overcome suffering. The level of wisdom decides the understanding of suffering and getting rid of suffering. To improve wisdom, we have to listen to the Buddha's message and reflect on wisely again and again as much as we can. Wisdom causes us to understand our entire life. Associating good friends and wise reflection play a main role on the path of purification of our mind.

All the teachings of the Buddha explained focus on the understanding of our body and mind. That understanding results in overcoming suffering and dissatisfaction. If we can listen to and read the Buddha's real message with confidence in the Buddha's enlightenment and investigate it wisely, we can get rid of suffering according to our understanding, wisdom and effort in this life itself. Because the Dhamma is with visible results, we are so fortunate, we can gain the results not only after death but while living. In this discourse called *Abhiññā Sutta*, the Buddha illustrates four kinds of qualities that we have to practice with supernormal knowledge in the name of real happiness.

*"Cattāro'me, bhikkhave, dhammā. Katame cattāro? Atthi, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pariññeyyā; atthi, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pahātābbā; atthi, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetābbā; atthi, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā sacchikātabbā".*

Four types of things (Dhammas) are to be dealt with supernormal knowledge (*abhiññā*).

They are;

- The first thing that we comprehend with supernormal (direct) knowledge is the five aggregates
- The second thing that we get rid of with supernormal (direct) knowledge is ignorance and craving for existence (attachment to become).
- The third thing that we develop with supernormal (direct) knowledge is tranquility and insight meditation.
- The fourth thing that we achieve with supernormal (direct) knowledge practicing the Buddha's message is wisdom and liberation.

• **Five aggregates (*Pañca Upādānakkhandā* - පඤ්චුපාදනක්ඛන්ධා):**

If we have any kind of experience through senses which are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, five aggregates arise. As the result of arising five aggregates, we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think. Every moment without any interval these five aggregates arise and cease. Because of ignorance or delusion, we think the experience still continues. Then we go to the real situation that happened in the past as soon as we think about it, and we desire or suffer according to that experience. The result of the ignorance of this reality is suffering. The five aggregates are;

- i. The group of form (corporeality) - රූප (Rupa)
- ii. The group of feelings - වේදනා (Vedanā)
- iii. The group of perception - සංකේත (Saññā)
- iv. The group of mental formation - සංඛාර (Saṅkhāra)
- v. The group of consciousness - විඤ්ඤාණ (Viññāṇa)

*Katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pariññeyyā? Pañca upādānakkhandhā. Ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pariññeyyā.*

If someone can understand these five things as they arise at the moment with conditions and they cease instantly, that person is ready to overcome suffering and unsatisfactoriness. Further, he realizes all his experiences arise and cease at the moment, nothing comes to the present from the past and nothing goes to the future from the present.

In this first part, the Buddha explains the first one of the four noble truths which is the noble truth of suffering (dissatisfaction). The first noble truth has been explained as a thing which should be realized by wisdom. The five aggregates which is dukkha sacca should be realized by the wise.

• **Ignorance and desire (*Avijjā ca Bhavataṇhā*- අවිජ්ජා ච භවතණ්හා) :**

As much as we have a clear knowledge about five aggregates, we further don't like to suffer. With this knowledge about the five aggregates, we know very well that if we think that these five aggregates are permanent, we have to suffer and experience pain, sorrow and lamentation with our life. An intelligent, educated and faithful disciple never likes suffering.

*Katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pahātabbā? Avijjā ca bhava-taṇhā ca. Ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā pahātabbā.*

When we clean our knowledge according to this teaching, we are able to overcome ignorance or delusion. Then we can get rid of all kinds of desires that we are attached to as dear and near. As much as we reduce our strong attachment, we can overcome unsatisfactoriness. It doesn't mean that we don't fulfil our duties and responsibilities. With this knowledge, we do all our duties better than we did before because practicing the Buddha's teachings is very practicable and humane. It helps us to be successful in our daily social life.

In the second part, the noble truth of the cause of suffering which is samudaya sacca, is explained. The Buddha pointed out that the cause of suffering should be overcome by the wise.

Tranquility and insight meditation (*Samatho ca vipassanā ca-* සමථෝ ච විපස්සනා ච):

With the knowledge of world reality, we hope to develop our mind. Practicing meditation is a main part of mental purification as the Buddha mentioned. Meditation in Buddhism is divided into two stages which are tranquility meditation and insight meditation.

*Katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā? Samatho ca vipassanā ca. Ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā.*

The purpose of tranquility meditation is focusing our mind in a particular wholesome thought such as breathing or loving kindness. When we practice our mind again and again using some kinds of meditation techniques, we can concentrate our mind for a long time without defilements such as desire or anger. As its results, we gain peace of mind and purification of mind that causes our happiness. With the concentrated mind, we focus on impermanence according to arising and ceasing of five aggregates. It is called insight meditation which is the specialty in Buddhism among all other religions and teachings. Both tranquility and insight meditations are very important for the purification of mind. If someone practices this message, he or she is able to get rid of all kinds of pain, sorrow and lamentation.

In the third part, magga sacca which is the path to liberation is explained. Practicing concentration and wisdom is the path of liberation in short and with detail the noble eightfold path. Concentration and wisdom should be developed by the wise for liberation.

- Wisdom and liberation (*Vijjā ca Vimutti ca - විජ්ජා ච විමුක්ති ච*).

By practicing above three steps, it brings wisdom and liberation as results.

*Katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā sacchikātabbā? Vijjā ca vimutti ca. Ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā sacchikātabbā.*

Wisdom means understanding of the world reality of mind and body as it is. As much as we have this understanding, we are able to liberate from all defilements. Then we have a clear knowledge that how much freedom from suffering we have. This is a visible result that a person can gain in this life itself as the result of practicing Buddha's teaching. On this path, honesty, loving kindness, knowledge, wise reflection and meditation are very important and useful qualities that we have to develop gradually from beginning to the highest level. Especially, we have to cultivate mindfulness and intelligence (the knowledge about the dependent origination-*paticcasamuppāda*) to the maximum level. If someone can go on this path correctly, he or she can reach real happiness overcoming all pain, sorrow, suffering and unsatisfactoriness. Buddhism always points out the path for this liberation. Our real success depends on how much we have overcome suffering not earning money or any other material things.

In the fourth part, the Buddha has explained the third noble truth which is the cessation of suffering, *Nirodha sacca*. The cessation of suffering should be achieved by the wise.

As the result of practicing this path, the Five Spiritual Faculties ('*Pañca Indriya Dhamma*' in Pali) gradually increase in our life. They are;

1. *Saddhā* - සද්ධා (Faith)
2. *Viriya* - විරිය (Energy)
3. *Sathi* - සති (Mindfulness)
4. *Samādhi* - සමාධි (Concentration)
5. *Paññā* - පඤ්ඤා (Wisdom)

***Saddhā*** means the faith or confidence that a person has about the supreme Buddha, his teachings and his noble disciples. Actually, this is not a blind faith, it is the confidence that we develop understanding the qualities of the Buddha, his teachings and his noble disciples. As much as an intelligent person listens to the Buddha's message, consisting with the dependent origination consciously, his confidence about the triple gem increases gradually.

***Viriya*** means the energy to decrease evil or unwholesomeness and to develop goodness or wholesomeness. As a result of the knowledge of the world reality that is the karmic force and the dependent origination, the intelligent person is ready to practice the path that leads to real happiness. Then he doesn't like to suffer further. As his faith in the triple gem increases, he develops his courage to avoid unwholesome deeds and develop wholesome deeds.

***Sathi*** means mindfulness or awareness. With faith and energy. The wise person tries to live every moment mindfully. Mindfulness is also divided into four categories as 1.the contemplation of body, 2.the contemplation of feelings, 3.the contemplation of mind, 4.the contemplation of mental conditions. According to '**Mahā Satipattāna Sutta**' all our activities, thoughts, feelings and mental conditions can be included in mindfulness. If we are in right mindfulness, it means we are on the path of purification and we are on the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

***Samādhi*** means tranquility or concentration of mind. As a result of focusing our mind on a particular object such as loving kindness meditation, we can purify our mind from defilements or lust. Then our mind is pure, steady and calm like a water well. That pure mind can gain happiness and it causes to discover and see world reality with wisdom. The wisdom depends on concentration. Wisdom and concentration are interrelated which help each other.

***Paññā*** means wisdom. The wisdom that comes in Buddhism is focused on understanding of dependent origination (or the cause and effect). It means the experience that we have through our senses arises and ceases at the same moment. Nothing comes to the present from the past and nothing goes to the future from the present. This is the only way to get rid of all sufferings. That means we are on the way to happiness. If we can always practice these five spiritual faculties, then every moment we are reaching for liberation from suffering. This is the way to attain a life with fresh perspectives.

Concentration is not enough to eradicate defilements completely. That is why Buddhism explains us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. According to Buddhism, a person's real success depends on getting rid of suffering. Getting rid suffering depends on the duration of reflecting on the three characteristics. The more one who reflects on the three characteristics the more he overcomes the Sansaric circle and suffering as well. In wisdom, with the concentrated mind, we should reflect on the three characteristics (*Tilakkhaṇa*) of existence of all kinds of things mental and physical. They are;

- i. Impermanence - (*Anicca*) අනිච්ච
- ii. Dissatisfaction - (*Dukkha*) දුක්ඛ
- iii. Selflessness - (*Anatta*) අනත්ත

We reflect again and again on these three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhaṇa* - ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). As a result of practicing this world reality, we develop wisdom with the knowledge of impermanence. Reflecting on above three characteristics is the path to purity.

Everything is impermanent. He who sees this reality with wisdom overcomes suffering. This is path to purity.

Everything is unsatisfactory. He who sees this reality with wisdom overcomes suffering. This is path to purity.

All phenomena are egoless. He who sees this reality with wisdom overcomes suffering. This is path to purity.

When a Supreme Buddha meets a person, the Buddha becomes aware of that person's spiritual power that he practiced in his previous lives. Then the Buddha decides how to explain the world reality to him. So, the Buddha searches through that person's mind with the Buddha's own mind. According to what he learns from this search, the Buddha understands the person's spirituality and explains his teachings to him. These five things are the real property which brings happiness in our Sansaric Journey. Also, we are able to overcome the Sansaric circle completely. Then we reflect on impermanence, dissatisfaction and egolessness about the five aggregates, the six senses, the twelve spears and the eighteen elements. This is the best success of a person who was born in this world when the Buddha's dispensation is alive. We should follow this path as much as we can.

May the Triple Gem Bless you!

## **Dhamma Discussion**

For the Sri Lankan Bhikkhu Association in Europe

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